14

The states and cultures of the Lower Guinean coast

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For the peoples of the Lower Guinea coast, from modern southern Côte d'Ivoire to modern Benin, or from the Bandama to the Mono rivers in general and the Akan, the Ga and the Ewe rivers in particular, 1500–1800 was – possibly – one of the most revolutionary periods in their history. It witnessed, first and foremost, the completion of the migrations of these peoples from their various cradles into their present areas of abode and the evolution of most of the ethno-linguistic groups into which they are divided today. Secondly, it saw the intensification of the trading and cultural links between these peoples and those of western Sudan, the Sahara and the Maghreb, and the opening of a completely new channel of communication and trade across the Atlantic – first with Europe and then with the Americas. Thirdly, it saw the gradual centralization of states and the evolution of larger political entities or kingdoms and empires. Indeed, by 1800 nearly the whole area was organized into a single empire under the rule of one dynasty. Finally, the period was one of radical social and cultural transformation and the evolution of new classes and new religions. These four themes form the subject of this chapter.

The migrations and the evolution of new ethno-linguistic groups

Both oral and documentary evidence confirms that, in 1500, although some of these peoples had penetrated and occupied the areas in which they live today, most were still concentrated in their various cradles. Some of the Akan, for example, had penetrated southwards to the coast, to modern south-eastern Côte d'Ivoire and south-western Ghana.[1] But most were still living in their cradle, in the area of modern Adansi and Amanse in the Ofin-Pra basin where they were divided into eight matrilineal Adangbe (clans) – the Ada, Osudoku, Shai, La, Ningo, Kpone, Gbugbla and Krobo clans.

The Ga–Mashi, the Nungua and the Tema had long broken away from their Adangbe kinsmen in the lower Volta basin around the Lolorvor hills

1. A. A. Boahen, 1977.

and had founded a host of settlements in the Accra plains north of the coastal region where they now live.[2] According to the archaeologist Ozanne, Ayawaso, regarded as the last such settlement, was founded towards the end of the sixteenth century.[3]

The Ewe of modern Togo and Ghana had not yet begun their migrations but were all concentrated in their third ancestral home, Nuatsie or Notsie in modern Togo, the first two being Tado and Ketu.[4]

Between 1500 and 1800, particularly in the 1600s and early 1700s, the final phase occurred of the dispersions of these peoples into the areas in which they live today. Partly for economic reasons – to tap the new discovered gold- and kola-producing regions, partly for social reasons – population pressure, but mainly for political reasons, the Akan, the Ga–Adangbe and the Ewe began to move out in all directions, usually in small clan and lineage groups. The Akan, for instance, in the sixteenth century moved first north and east into the present Kumasi, Mampong and Akyem areas, and south and south-west into the present Wassa, Igwira, Sanwi and Assini areas. In the seventeenth century, more Akan moved in different matrilineal clan groups north into the present Asante, Asante–Akyem and Kwahu areas, northwest into the Kulango areas and southwest into the Wassa-Sehwi and the Lagoon areas of Côte d'Ivoire. Mainly for political reasons, 1680–1730 saw a particularly large and persistent migration of the Akan from the Kumasi, Anwianwia and Denkyira areas into the present Nzima, Aowin, Sehwi, Ahafo and northern Bono areas and the Anyi and Baule areas of Côte d'Ivoire. By the mid-1750s the Akan flow seems to have dried up.

During the Akan migration, the Ga also continued their dispersion from inland to the coast largely in response to the European presence there and the consequent greater economic opportunities. The Ga–Mashi, the Nungua and the Tema were the first to move in the sixteenth century and they were followed in the seventeenth by the Osu and Teshi peoples. Their kinsmen, the Adangbe, also began to spread out southwards and northwards into the Accra plains during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, some who moved north-eastwards into the mountainous regions becoming the Manya Krobo of today. Others, in the seventeenth century, moved to the coast to found such settlements as Ningo, Prampram and Ada.

The most dramatic migrations, however, were those involving the Ewe. In the late 1500s or early 1600s, mainly for political reasons and especially to escape the tyrannical rule of their king, Agokoli, the Ewe left Notsie in two main groups, the southern Ewe (Dagboawo or Dzieheawo) and the northern or interior Ewe (Demeawo or Numeawo).[5] The southern group

2. C. C. Reindorf, 1898, pp. 6–12.

3. P. Ozanne, 1962, p. 69.

4. N. L. Gayibor, 1977, pp. 11–15; H. W. Debrunner, 1965, pp. 3–10; C. M. K. Mamattah, 1979.

5. C. M. K. Mamattah, 1979, pp. 121–2.

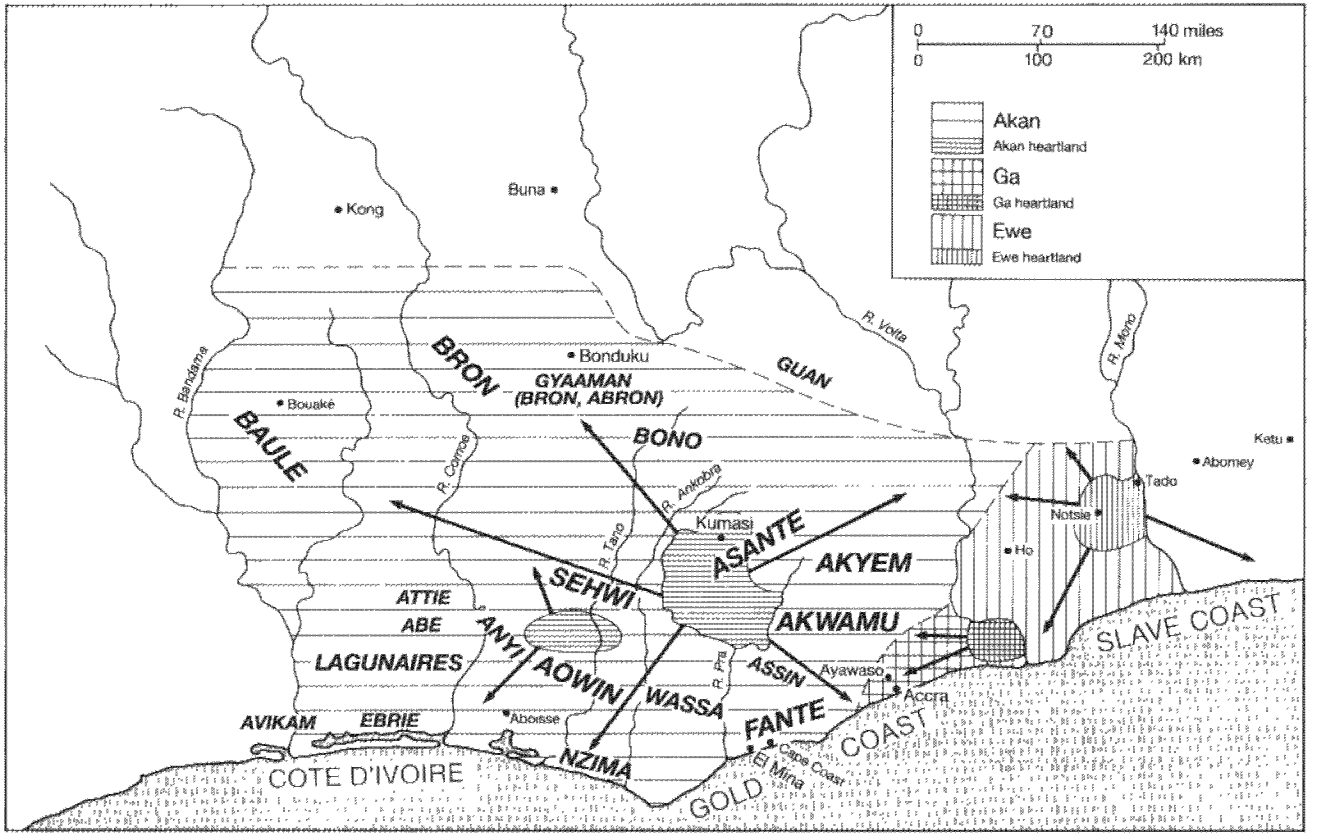

FIG 14.1 *The Akan, Ga and Ewe peoples (after A. A. Boahen)*

that moved to the coast, and their splinter groups, consisted of the Anlo and the Tongu while the northern groups that occupied the central and northern parts of the present southern Volta region were made up of the Asogli, Hopke, Akpini and Awudome. Sub-groups and splinter groups soon moved off to found other settlements and this process of fission and diffusion went on throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Thus, by 1800 the Anlo people comprised Anlo, Afife, Ave, Xevi, Veta, Some, Kliko, Flawu (or Aflao), Dodze and Avenori; the Tongu comprised Agave, Bakpa, Bato, Dofo, Fievie, Fodzoku, Mofi, Mefa, Sokpoe, Tefle, Togome, Volo and Vume; and the Asogli comprised Ho, Akoefe, Hodzo, Kpenoe, Takla, Adaklu, Abutia, Agotime, Akoviefe, and so on.[6]

These peoples did not only disperse or migrate: they also underwent ethno-linguistic changes. The Ewe and the Ga–Adangbe, who moved into areas sparsely populated by earlier peoples, such as the so-called Togo Remnant or Central Togo groups and the Guan, were able to maintain their ethnic and linguistic purity. Indeed, the main influence of the Guan communities on the Ga was religious. Many of the Akan, however, migrated into areas apparently fairly well populated by peoples of different languages, cultures and institutions. The Portuguese records of the 1480s and 1490s show that there were seven villages on the Côte d'Ivoire east of the Bandama river and Pacheco Pereira added in the 1550s that 'we know nothing of what trade there may be in this country but only know that it is densely populated'.[7] These peoples must have been the Adisi in the west, and the Ewotre, Agwa, Kompa and Mono in the east. It was the mixture of these groups and the incoming Akan that gave rise to the Mbalo, Alladian, Ebrie, Eotile, Avikam, etc., collectively known as the Lagunaires. Similarly, it was the mixture of the later Akan migrants and some of the pre-existing peoples that gave birth to the Anyi, Baule and Sehwi. The Akan, therefore, became divided into the two broad groups of today, namely, the Eastern and Western Akan between whom, as Diabate insists, 'there is not an immediate linguistic intelligibility'. Each group is now further divided, mainly along political lines, into a number of sub-groups. The Eastern Akan are divided into Asante, Akuapem, Akyem, Akwamu, Bron (Abron) or Gyaaman, Wassa, Kwahu, Fante, Assin, Denkyira and Gomua, all of whom speak almost the same language, namely, Twi. The Western Akan comprise the Anyi, Baule, Nzima, Ahanta, Sanwi (Afema), Aowin and Sehwi who speak mutually intelligible Akan dialects.

By the sixteenth century the sociopolitical institutions of these groups in their new homes showed similarities as well as differences. Both the Ga–Adangbe and the Ewe lived in scattered independent settlements in minor and major patrilineages and clan groups. The Adangbe, for instance, are divided into nine clans: the Asinodze, Blaka, Kpoku, La, Lekpodze, Lenodze, Nangla, Sepote and the Shalom. In each group each lineage had

6. C. M. K. Mamattah, 1979, pp. 147 and 155–8.
7. Quoted by T. F. Garrard, 1980, p. 48.

its own senior god whose priests were its leaders. However, by 1600 the Ga-Mashi had developed the office of king, based at Ayawaso.

The Akan, conversely lived in towns ruled by kings and queens and villages ruled by chiefs. Each town or village was made up of families belonging to the eight matrilineal clans into which they are all divided. These matrilineal clans are Ekoona (Asanwule among the Nzima), Oyoko (Anona among the Fante, or Alonroba or Nvavile among the Nzima and Anyi and Dwum or Dwimina among the Fante), Asenee, Agona, Bretuo (Twidan among the Fante), Asakyiri, Aduana or Atwea (Aberadze among the Fante and Asamangama or Ahwea among the Nzima).[8] Each family had an *abusuapanin* (head, leader) and so did each clan. It appears that each family or clan had its own god or gods and so did each village or settlement whose priests wielded considerable power. Among the Ga and Ewe these priests acted not only as religious but also as political leaders. In other words, society had already become stratified, with a ruling aristocracy consisting of priests and kings, ordinary subjects and relatively small number of domestic slaves. However, this social set-up was greatly altered by the political and economic developments of the 1500–1700s.

Economic changes in Lower Guinea

Equally far-reaching economic developments, both internal and external, took place in Lower Guinea from 1500–1800. Internally, already-established economic activities were continued and greatly expanded. These included collecting, farming, livestock-raising, hunting, fishing, salt-making and gold-mining.[9] Collecting was quite widespread, its most important feature being the collection of kola nuts from trees which grew wild in the forest areas of the Gold Coast, especially near modern Asante, Ahafo and Akyem, the home of the eastern Akan. These nuts formed the mainstay of trade between the Akan and the Gur, Mande and Hausa speakers of the savannah and western Sudan.

Farming also grew in importance, the main crops being plantain, bananas, yams and rice. To these were added, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a host of new crops, introduced into the Guinea coast by the Europeans from Asia and the Americas and including corn (maize), cassava (manioc), various types of yam, tomatoes, onions, eggplants, avocado pears, sweet potatoes, citrus fruits and groundnuts.[10] The rapid adoption of these crops by small farmers diversified the agricultural economy of the Guinea coast and must have thereby accelerated population growth.

Livestock-raising involving poultry, sheep, goats and pigs was practised, as were fishing and hunting. Fishing was the main economic activity of the

8. A. A. Boahen, 1966, p. 4.
9. K. B. Dickson, 1969, pp. 72–89.
10. J. P. Murdock, 1959, pp. 21–4; D. G. Coursey, 1966.

Ewe, and Ga and other coastal peoples such as the Fante, the Ahanta, the Nzima and the Lagunaires. Hunting was done by all, first with spears, bows and arrows and sticks and later with guns.

Two of these primary activities, salt-making and gold-mining, became increasingly important between 1500 and 1800. Nearly all salt was produced by the coastal inhabitants,[11] while gold-mining was the exclusive preserve of the inland forest people, especially the Akan in the Wassa region and the areas referred to in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century European records as Arcany or Akanny or Arcania – that is, modern Asante, Kwahu and Akyem[12] as well as Brong Ahafo, Bron or Gyaaman and Baule. These were the areas which also produced kola nuts, the mainstay of trade with northern and western Sudan. Gold was obtained in two ways, by panning the alluvial soils from riverbeds and dry valleys and *nkoron* (deep-mining). While panning had been in use since ancient times, deep-mining was probably introduced into Akan territory by the Mande in the thirteenth or fourteenth century.[13]

Gold-mining, which in many areas was rigidly controlled by the state and formed the main source of income of the rulers, reached its peak in the late 1600s when about 2 000 000 oz of gold was produced.[14] Throughout this period gold-mining remained the exclusive monopoly of the Akan themselves and all European efforts – particularly Dutch – to participate directly in its production were resisted.[15]

At the same time there developed another increasingly important economic activity, namely trade, in which slaves played a prominent role as porters. Trade fell into two sectors: internal and external. The Ewe, the Ga and the Akan had long been trading among themselves: fish and salt, produced by the Ewe, the Ga and the Fante, and Adangbe pottery being exchanged for the gold, *tweapea* (chewing sticks), ivory and iron or metal-wear produced by the Akan of the interior. Oral traditions and European records clearly show that this internal trade, conducted in local and regional markets or fairs, increased in volume and importance. Of the salt trade between the coast and the interior Bosman says:

> It is not to be imagined what vast riches the Negroes get by boiling of salt and if they (i.e., the Fante) were always, or for the most part in Peace, those who follow that Employment would in a short time amass unwieldly sums; for all the Inland Negroes are obliged to fetch their salt from the Sore, from whence it is easy to infer that it must cost them very dear ...[16]

11. For a vivid description of the different ways in which salt was produced on the Guinea Coast, see W. Bosman, 1967, pp. 308–9.
12. A. A. Boahen, 1973.
13. T. F. Garrard, 1980, pp. 24–5; I. G. Wilks, 1962c, p. 166.
14. T. F. Garrard, 1980, p. 166.
15. W. Bosman, 1967, p. 80.
16. ibid., p. 308.

But even more important was the development of external trade. Two branches developed, the older with the savannah and western Sudan and the other across the Atlantic with Europe and later, the Americas. Arabic sources such as the *Kano Chronicle*, Portuguese records from 1470–1500 and oral traditions clearly show that by 1500 the Ga, the Ewe and the Akan had established trading links with the Guan and Gur to their north, with the Hausa of northern Nigeria to the north-east and the Mande of the Niger Bend to the north-west in gold, kola nuts, textiles, slaves and salt. Between 1500 and 1800 these links were strengthened, the Akan in particular building up trade with the Mande and Hausa during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[17] With the rise and expansion of Songhay in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and consequent order and peace, trade between Akan and Mande boomed. It was to control this trade that the Joola established a number of trading posts or refreshment centres, such as Bobo-Dioulasso, Kong, Bonduku, Buna (Bouna) and Begho, between the Niger Bend and the gold-producing countries to the south. Jenne and Begho, the main entrepôts of the north-west trade became extremely wealthy during the sixteenth century, as is evident from both written and archaeological sources. In these north-western markets, the Akan exchanged mainly gold, kola nuts and, later, European imports for cloths, blankets, Turkish carpets, striped and blue silks, leather goods, iron-ware, brassware and salt.[18]

The overthrow of Songhay in the late 1500s and the subsequent insecurity was thought to have destroyed trade along the north-west routes. Now, however, it has been convincingly shown that trade did not decline during the eighteenth century but increased in volume instead.[19] It was with a view to tapping that trade that Asante expanded, conquering Bron or Gyaaman, Banda and Bono during the early 1700s. In fact this trade continued even into the nineteenth century in the new market centres that emerged, such as Atebubu and Kintampo.

Trade between the Akan and Hausaland and Borno also continued. It was already in progress and of some importance by the beginning of the sixteenth century, as substantiated by the eye-witness accounts of Leo Africanus who visited Songhay and Hausaland.[20] And it grew in intensity and volume, particularly during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries following the growth of the Mole-Dagbane states of Mamprusi, Dagomba, Nanumba and Mossi and also the Hausa state. Nothing illustrates this better than the wealthy state in which the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century European explorers and travellers found such towns as Kano and Katsina in Hausaland and, above all, Salaga in northern Gold Coast which

17. For evidence, see A. A. Boahen, 1977.

18. V. Lamb, 1975, pp. 86–92.

19. E. W. Bovill, 1968, p. 195; J. R. Willis, 1971; E. A. McDougall, 1980; C. C. Stewart, 1976.

20. Leo Africanus, 1956; N. Levtzion, 1968, pp. 14–22.

was then the main southern entrepôt for the north-east trade.

Gold may have been exported by the Akan to Hausaland in the sixteenth century, but it seems that gold exports had ceased during the eighteenth century, probably because of strong European competition. Akan kola, however, continued as the mainstay of the north-east trade from 1500–1800. Kola nuts were re-exported from Hausaland and Borno into the Sahara and Barbary states: in the 1780s Lucas met a Shereef in Tripoli who told him of the trade between Tripoli and Asante.[21] The nuts were conveyed in caravans of bullocks, asses, horses and slaves. In exchange, the Akan imported cotton cloths, blankets, Turkish carpets, smocks, sandals and other leather goods, natron, brassware and red glass beads. A far more important and voluminous trade, however, was also developing – the trans-Atlantic trade between the Lower Guinea coast and Europe and the Americas. It started when the Portuguese dropped anchor off the coast of modern Ghana in 1471. Then followed, in the sixteenth century, the French, English and Dutch and, in the seventeenth, the Danes, the Swedes and the Brandenburgers. The last two, however, abandoned the Guinea coast in 1661 and 1732 respectively. Direct trade with the West Indies began in 1518 when the first cargo of slaves was sent there in a Spanish ship. Trade with the North American mainland commenced in 1619 when a Dutch frigate discharged the first load of West African slaves at Jamestown in the state of Virginia.[22] Thus, by the mid-1600s, the triangular trade linking the Guinea coast, Europe and the Americas was fully established.

The commodities the Lower Guinea coast sold to Europeans varied from region to region and from century to century. Until the 1690s the Akan between the Bandama and the Ankobra rivers sold mainly ivory, while the Akan and the Ga between the Ankobra and the Volta rivers sold mostly gold. Throughout the sixteenth century, there seems to have been very little trade between the Ewe and the Europeans between the Volta and the Mono rivers. Most Portuguese avoided that stretch, sailing straight from the Accra region to Whydah in Dahomey and Benin in Nigeria.[23] Only from 1650 did the Dutch and the Danes operate there, slaves being the main commodity.

As a result of this specialization, European traders divided the coast of Lower Guinea into the Côte d'Ivoire, the Gold Coast and the Slave Coast. Until the end of the seventeenth century, however, gold was by far the most important commodity and of prime concern to both Europeans and Africans. Every European nation tried to gain a footing on the Gold Coast, and a huge number of forts and castles was built there between the Ankobra and the Volta rivers. According to Lawrence, as many as forty-two forts and castles were built in West Africa from Senegal to Cameroon, with

21. J. Beecham, 1841, pp. 149–55.
22. A. A. Boahen, 1971, p. 315. See also UNESCO, 1979, Document 12.
23. H. W. Debrunner, 1965, pp. 21–3.

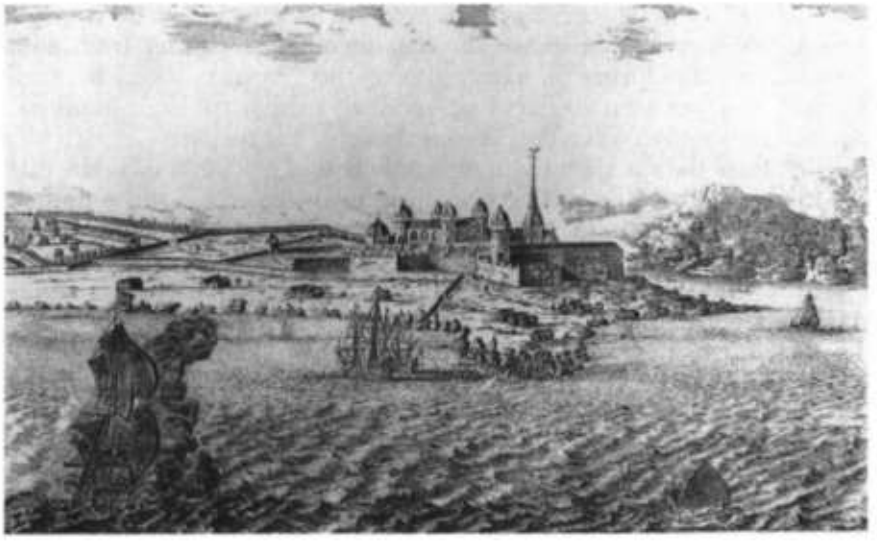

PLATE 14.1 *Fort St George at El Mina, as it was in the time of the Portuguese*

thirty-two on the Gold Coast alone. None were built on the Nigerian coast.[24]

From 1650 to 1800, however, the export trade between the Ga and the Eastern Akan and Europe underwent a revolutionary change. The records clearly show that, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, slaves were imported into the Gold Coast from Benin, São Tomé and Whydah – obviously to be used in the gold mines. In April 1529, for example, 2060 slaves were imported into the Gold Coast from Benin, and 80 from São Tomé to El Mina in 1535.[25] But from the mid-1600s the Ga and Akan of the Gold Coast began to export slaves and did so in such increasing numbers that by 1710 trade in slaves had exceeded that in gold. In 1704, the Dutch representative at El Mina, William de la Palma, reported that 'the Negroes ... now pay more attention to the slave trade than the gold trade as they do better by it'.[26] William Smith, an Englishman who visited the Fante Coast in 1726, remarked in disgust: 'Why this is called the Gold Coast, I do not know'.[27] The trade continued to grow throughout the first half of the eighteenth century: according to Daaku, 5–6000 slaves were being exported annually by 1700, rising to 6–7000 in the eighteenth century when, according to Curtin, a total of 474 000 slaves[28] was exported. The

24. A. W. Lawrence, 1969, pp. 12–13.
25. W. Rodney, 1969a.
26. Furley Collections (F.C.), W. de la Palma to the X, 31 Aug. 1704. See also K. Y. Daaku, 1970, pp. 46–7.
27. W. Smith, in T. Astley, 1745, Vol. II, p. 138.
28. P. D. Curtin, 1969, p. 221.

accuracy of Curtin's figures has been heatedly debated and there is now a general concensus that he underestimated the number exported from West Africa, especially during the eighteenth century, by as much as between 7.3 and 18.4 per cent.[29] The Ewe areas also exported large numbers, especially after 1730 when the Akwamu invaded the region.

Why, then, did the slave trade supersede that of gold on the Gold Coast in the eighteenth century? There are three main answers to this question. The first is the great increase in the demand for slaves following the introduction from the 1640s of the plantation system of sugar cultivation into the Caribbean Islands and the mainland of America. This demand was almost insatiable throughout the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries.[30] The second answer is the enormous rise in the number of war-captives owing to a great increase in the incidence of wars and also from 1650, the growing use of fire-arms. The war-captives could not be contained locally and had to be exported. The period from 1670 to 1750, when the slave trade was at its peak, coincided with the rise and expansion first of the Denkyira and Akwamu and then of the Asante empires. Most slaves were war- or raid-captives.[31] The third answer, which follows from the second, is the increase in the number of slaves collected as tribute from vassal states especially following the rise of the three new empires. Most of their vassal states – especially Asante's – paid tribute in the form of slaves. Like gold, the supply of slaves to Europeans on the Gold Coast remained the exclusive preserve of the Africans themselves.

Although the Ewe, Ga and Eastern Akan exported more slaves than gold from the end of the seventeenth century, the western Akan of Côte d'Ivoire continued to export primarily ivory and gold throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Imports into Lower Guinea also underwent revolutionary changes both in volume and quality. In the late 1400s and the 1500s the principal imports were clothes mostly manufactured not in Europe but in the Barbary states, Benin and Côte d'Ivoire.[32] Clothes from the Barbary states, referred to in early Portuguese sources as *lanbens*, *hallabens* and *aljaravais*, the cloths of Benin and the Quaqua cloth of the Ivory Coast were popular on the Gold Coast before the arrival of the Portuguese who immediately took advantage of the demand and started trading in cloth. The export of Benin and Quaqua cloths to the Gold Coast certainly continued into the seventeenth century. Other imports, according to the list provided by Pacheco Pereira in the 1500s, were brass bracelets, handkerchiefs, corals and certain 'red

29. J. E. Inikori, 1976; P. D. Curtin, R. Anstey and J. E. Inikori, 1976; R. Stein, 1978. See also ch. 3 above.

30. J. E. Inikori, 1976, pp. 4–5.

31. P. E. H. Hair, 1965; P. D. Curtin, 1969.

32. V. Lamb, 1975, pp. 84–5.

shells which they prize as we prize precious stones, white wine and blue beads which they call coris'.[33]

By the seventeenth century the list of imports had increased considerably. Pieter de Marees, writing in the early 1600s, has left the following account of goods brought in by the Dutch alone:

> Great store of light linen cloth whereof there is very much spent in those for they apparell themselves therewith besides great store of basons of all sizes, for drinking, washing in, burials, kettles to fetch water in, red copper pots, castle pots; iron used to make assagaie, cutting knives; great store of red, blue, yellow and green Rupish cloth, used for girdles about their middles to hang their knives, purses etc. Spanish serges, Dutch knives, great store of Venice beads of all kinds, and colours which they break and grind and put them on strings made of bark of trees and sold, pins used to make fish hooks, looking glasses and small copper milk cans. But the chiefest wares that are wanted there and most used among them is Linen cloth, brass and copper things, basons, kettles, knives and corals.[34]

This list shows that these imports, including both textiles and beads, now came mainly from Europe. There is no mention of fire-arms, probably because the import of guns and gunpowder only began in earnest in the 1640s when the English and the interlopers started selling arms on the coast.[35] So popular did fire-arms become that in 1658 the Dutch could report that 'only musquets sell well' and that 'the natives take the field with thousands of them'.[36] In 1660 the Dutch lifted their fire-arms export ban and started exporting in quantity. Between 1673 and 1704 the Royal African Company alone shipped almost 66 000 fire-arms and more than 9000 barrels of gunpowder to West Africa, mostly to the Gold Coast. Fire-arms exports increased throughout the eighteenth century and remained the item most in demand on the Gold Coast. According to Inikori, from 1750 to 1807 a total of 49 130 368 pounds of gunpowder was exported to West Africa from Britain alone giving an annual average of 847 075 pounds.[37]

The value of non-slave exports from West Africa to England between 1750 and 1807 was £5 443 682 (£900 000-worth of gold) while that of slaves exported by English merchants alone totalled £53 669 184. If the English share of the trade in slaves was 45 per cent, the total value of exports from West Africa during the second half of the eighteenth century would have been £131 361 920 or £2 264 861 annually.[38]

33. D. P. Pereira, 1937.
34. P. de Marees, in S. Purchas, 1905, Vol. VI, pp. 281–2.
35. R. A. Kea, 1971; K. Y. Daaku, 1970a, pp. 148–52.
36. F. C. Valkenburgh's Report to the XIV, June 1658.
37. J. E. Inikori, 1977.
38. J. D. Fage, 1969a; W. Rodney, 1969a.

The effects of the economic developments

Economically the Lower Guinea coast changed dramatically from 1500 to 1800 and the effects of this change were several. One was the evolution of a complicated network of major and minor trade routes. These first linked the peoples of the area to one another, then linked them to the Mole–Dagbane and Hausa to the north-east, the Mande to the north-west and to the Barbary states across the Sahara and the Muslim world. Finally the network spread across the Atlantic, first to Europe and, from the sixteenth century, to the Americas. At the centre of this network lay the town of Kumasi.

Another effect was the emergence mainly along these routes of a number of urban centres which served as entrepôts, market centres or termini. These included Kong, Bobo–Dioulasso, Buna, Begho and Bonduku to the north-west; Salaga, Yendi and Sansanne-Mango to the north-east and Tiassalé, Sakasso, Yakasso, Krinjabo, Kumasi, Kete–Krachi and Akwamufie in the south.

The European presence on the coast accelerated the growth of the towns there at the expense of the former capital towns immediately inland. By 1800 these towns had broken away from those inland and developed into independent city-states. Thus Mouri had broken away from Asebu, Cape Coast from Fetu, El Mina from Aguafo and Anomabo from Mankesim.

Another effect of the new network was the integration of the economy of the Lower Guinea coast into that of western Europe and America and also that of the Mande–Hausa–Muslim world. In time the latter link weakened, however, while that with Europe and the Americas grew stronger.

As a result of this integration economic and industrial developments in Lower Guinea were destroyed or stunted. Trade in slaves – the most destructive, hideous and inhuman of all trades – steadily replaced trade in natural products. Moreover, it denuded the area of its labour force and - some of its skilled artisans, craftsmen and artists. Instead of exporting goods which would have stimulated existing industries and the creativity of the Ewe, the Akan and the Ga, Europe exported only cheap mass consumer goods thereby killing existing industries or seriously retarding their growth. In short, from 1500 to 1800 there was economic growth in Lower Guinea but without economic development. Moreover, since Europe controlled both importation and exportation, she kept most of the profits. Herein lie the roots of the process of underdevelopment, aggravated in the 1900s by the abolition of the slave trade and the establishment of colonialism in Africa.

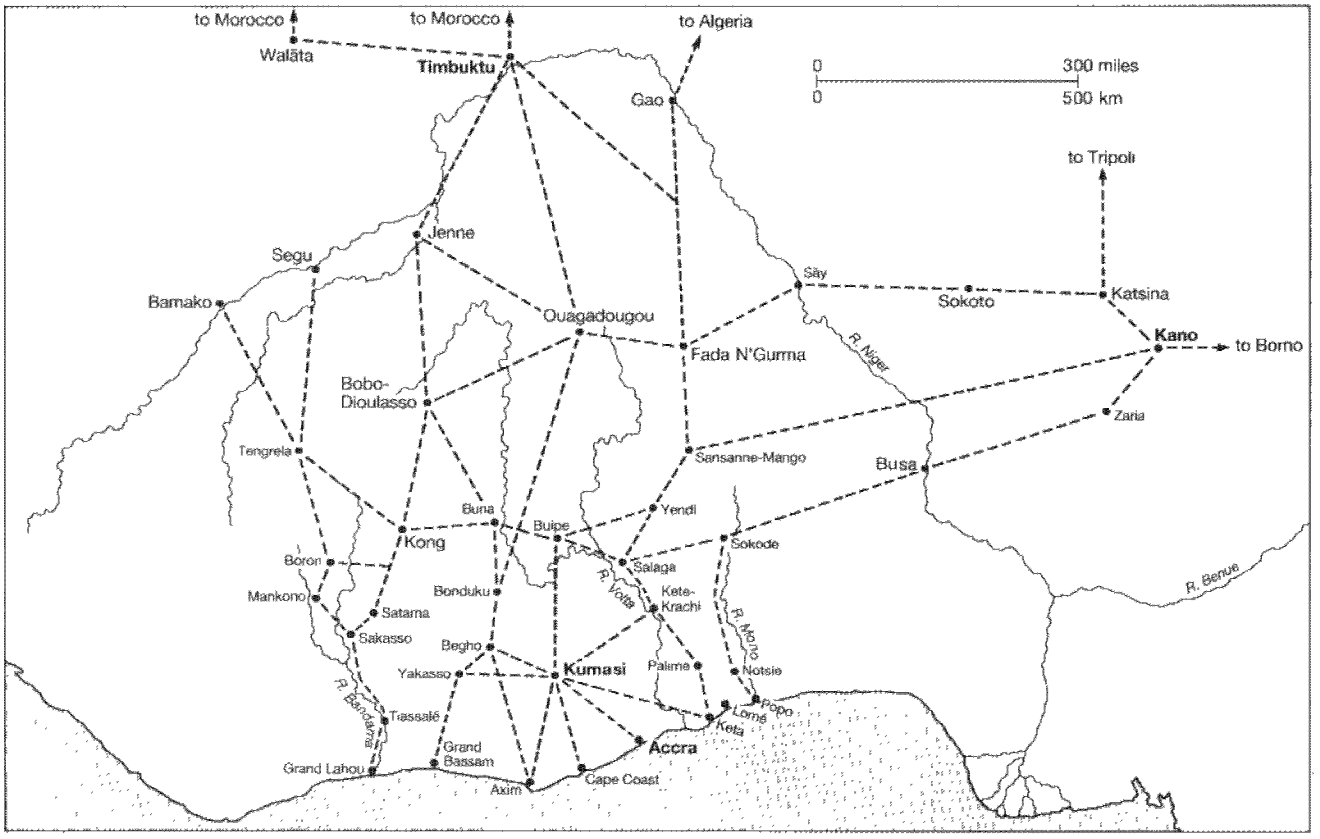

FIG 14.2 *Principal trade routes of the Bandama–Volta–Mono basins (after A. A. Boahen)*

Political changes on the Lower Guinea coast

Political change between 1500 and 1800 was even more radical than economic.

By 1500 the process of state formation had already begun and a number of states had emerged on the coast and in the northern savannah regions. The Portuguese arrived to find the coastal states of Ahanta, Shama Aguafo, Fetu, Asebu, Agona and Accra already in existence in addition to the Mole–Dagbane cluster of Mamprusi, Dagomba, Nanumba and Ouagadougou (Wagadugu) and the Akan state of Bono in the savannah belt.[39] The process of state-building continued to gather momentum with the first Akan kingdom, Bono, emerging in the second half of the fifteenth century and reaching its peak through the lucrative trade with the Mande and the Akan centred around Begho.[40]

During the sixteenth century, the Ga-Mashi, the Nungua and the Tema were joined in the Accra plains by the Labadi and the Osu, all of whom founded numerous settlements. Before 1300 the Ga had had no kings, being ruled by priests. But by 1600 secular kingship had evolved, probably inspired by their Akan or Adangbe neighbours. During the early 1600s, attracted by the European presence, some Ga moved to the coast. The Ga-Mashi, the Nungua and the Osudoku were the first to move followed by the La who founded Labadi on lands conquered from the Nungua while the Osu seized land from the Osudoku. The last Ga principality to be founded on the coast was Teshi built on land presented by the Nungua to a group that had migrated from Labadi. All these coastal towns, however, recognized the suzerainty of the Ga *Mantse* (king) at Ayawaso which remained the kingdom's capital until 1680 when it was moved to the coast.

What seems to have happened among the Akan in the 1500s was the formation in the Pra-Ofin basin of a number of small communities and city-states or chiefdoms bound together not by allegiance to a common sovereign but by kinship, agnatic and clan ties and linked by trade routes. However, it appears from the oral traditions of Adansi that, from about 1550, some move towards centralization was made by the clan and city-states around Fomena and Akrokyere led by Awurade Basa, king of Fomena.[41] This led to the formation of the Adansi confederation of states but also precipitated the migrations of some Akan northwards and southwards to found their own chiefdoms, city-states and principalities, such as Kwahu, Akyem Abuakwa, Akyem Kotoku and Akwamu; Wassa Twifo, Igwira and Adom further south; and Tafo, Suntreso, Kaasa and Amakom all now part of the municipality of Kumasi.[42]

State formation seems to have accelerated between 1580 and 1630 as

39. A. A. Boahen, 1966b and 1977.
40. C. K. Effah-Gyamfi, 1978.
41. K. Y. Daaku, 1969, p. iii.
42. K. Y. Daaku, 1966a, pp. 10–13.

demonstrated by a most revealing map of the states of southern Gold Coast between the Tano and Volta rivers drawn by a Dutch cartographer on 25 December 1629. The map depicts about thirty-eight states and kingdoms. All except two, Great Incassa and Incassa Igwira,[43] have been identified and still exist in the same areas.

These states were founded by the migratory Ga and Akan mentioned above. With so many states in so limited an area, they must have been small, many being mere city-states or small chiefdoms. However, though different in size, all appear to have been similarly structured, with a single ruler or chief, or a king and queen. The Adansi confederation, for example, rotated the headship among the royal families of its various states. In the single states, the king was selected (in accordance with the matrilineal principle in the case of the Akan) from its royal family – usually the first family or clan to arrive in the area. He was advised by a council of family – or clan – leaders and was more the first among equals than a dictator. Each state had its own gods – river, lake or rock gods, for example – and their priests wielded considerable influence in society.

Between 1630 and about 1670 two main political developments took place in the Ga and Akan areas. The first was the steady consolidation and growth of the states shown on the 1629 map and the second was the emergence of new states. Oral sources show that kingdoms like Akwamu, Denkyira, Accra or Ga, Fante, Wassa and Adom greatly expanded their frontiers largely through peaceful means. The Ga, for instance, extended northwards from the coastal plains to include the Guan principalities below the Akuapem Hills where they established their important market centre of Abonse – A.B.C. of the 1629 map – and westwards to include the Guan principalities of Awutu and Senya. Ga was at its biggest and most powerful peak under King Okai Akwei (*c.*1640–77).

At the same time the Aduana state of Akwamu also became a strong kingdom occupying present-day Asamankese, Kade, Nsawan and Akuapem. Meanwhile Denkyira broke away from the Adansi Confederation, after a series of wars in the 1650s and 1660s and firmly established itself at the confluence of the Ofin-Pra rivers.[44] On the coast the Fante extended their territory inland and European records frequently refer to wars between Fante and Etsi peoples to the north.[45] Wassa and Adom in the south and west also expanded.

The Denkyira–Adansi wars (1650–70) and the Bono wars had greatly accelerated migration southwards and westwards into the forest where older peoples, such as the Adisi, Ewotre, Agwa, Kompa and the Lagunaires,

43. Great Incassa and Incassa Igwira have been identified by some scholars such as Fynn and Porter with the Sehwi states whose rise will be discussed below. This, however, is doubtful since their oral traditions do not mention the former nor claim any relationship with them. See R. Porter, 1974, p. 37; J. K. Fynn, 1971, p. 43.

44. I. G. Wilks, 1957; K. Y. Daaku, 1970b, pp. 144–61.

45. A. A. Boahen, 1965, pp. 175–80.

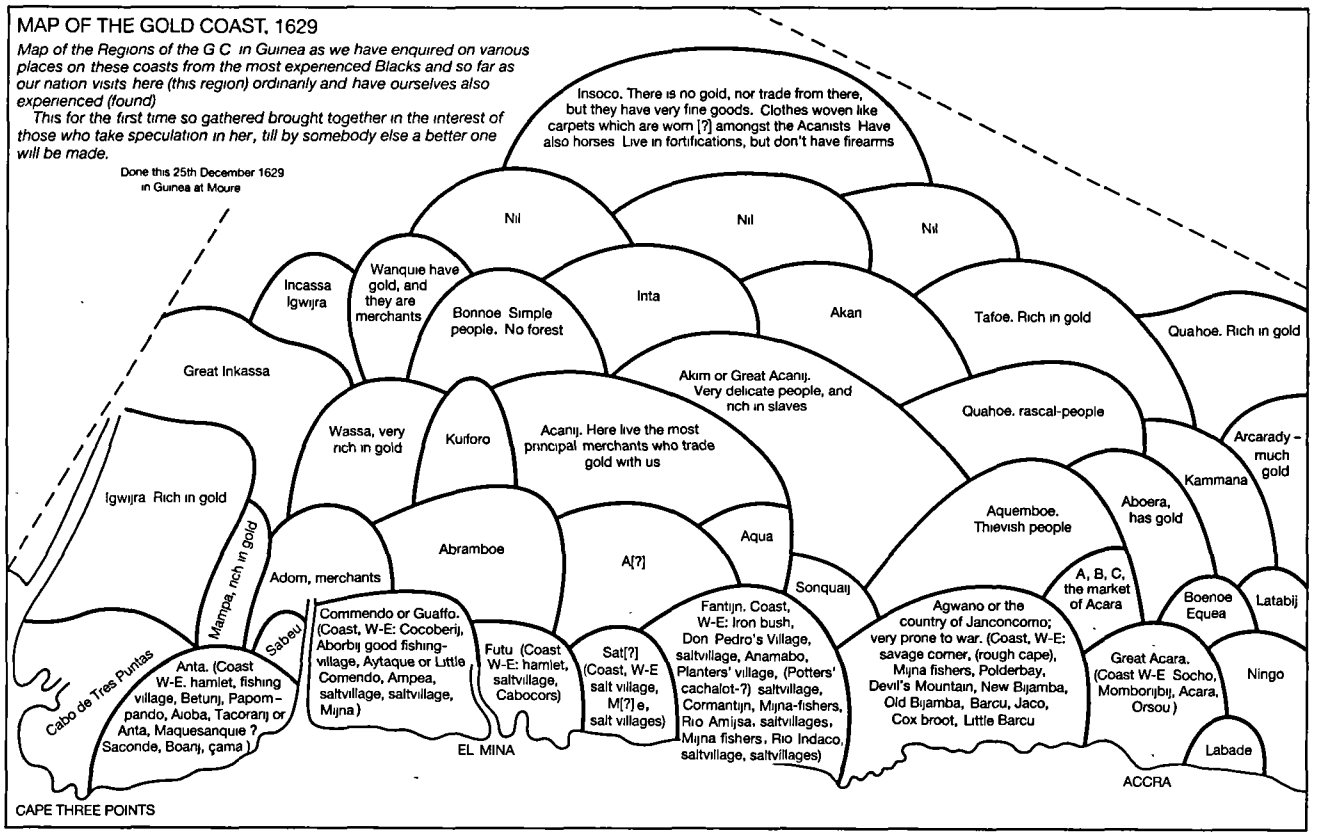

FIG 14.3 *Re-drawing of a 1629 map of the Gold Coast*

lived. These new groups founded not only Aowin, near present-day Wassa Amanfi, with its capital Enyini Nsu near the village of Anwianwia,[46] but also the three Sehwi states – Anwhiaso, Bekwai and Wiawso – in the south, states such as Assini, Abripiquem and Ankobra and a host of coastal towns. In one of the richest gold areas and on the main trade route linking the northern markets of Begho and Bonduku with the coast, by the 1670s Aowin had grown into a strong and rich kingdom.[47]

The Denkyira–Adansi migrants who moved northwards founded the Oyoko states of Kumasi, Kokofu, Dwaben, Nsuta and later Bekwai and the Bretuo states of Mampong and Afigyaase all within a fifty-kilometre radius of Kumasi. Further north others founded the Aduana state of Gyaaman or Abron among the resident Gbin, Nkoran, Nafana, Fantara and Kulango.[48]

The new states seem to have been organized like the old. The Sehwi and Aowin states, for instance, superimposed the sophisticated Akan clan system and the institution of matrilineally elected kingship on the existing socio-political structure based on *asago* (warrior) companies grouped around living-quarters.

However, between 1570 and 1600, a political revolution took place marked not by the emergence of new states but by the centralization of existing ones, apparently pioneered by Aowin and Denkyira (Fig. 14.4). In the 1670s and 1680s Aowin conquered the Sehwi states to the north and west and expanded far west to embrace such Côte d'Ivoire towns as Keteso, Yawu, Brako and Sikasso.[49]

While Aowin was expanding so was Denkyira, from her capital of Abankieso, at the Pra-Ofin confluence, in almost every direction. In the 1670s and 1680s, in a series of brilliant campaigns, the Agona rulers of Denkyira conquered all the Adansi and the pre-Asante states near Kumasi to the north and Assin and Twifo to the south. Between 1686 and 1690, they also defeated Aowin, the Sehwi states and Wassa to the south-west and the coastal kingdoms Adom and Fetu.[50] By 1690, Denkyira dominated the south-western Gold Coast and parts of the Côte d'Ivoire.[51]

In the south-eastern regions, meanwhile, Akwamu was also consolidating its power, expanding outwards from the newly established capital, Nyanoase, near modern Nsawan. The Akwamu rulers first attacked the Ga kingdom which was finally conquered in 1681. Then they turned westwards to subdue the coastal kingdom, Agona, in 1689. In their final campaigns (1702–10) they conquered the Adangbe states to the east and Kwahu to

46. Personal communication from H. Diabaté (1977).
47. K. Y. Daaku, n.d.
48. E. A. Agyeman, 1965, pp. 36–9; M. A. Clerici, 1962, pp. 27–8.
49. K. Y. Daaku, n.d.
50. ibid., pp. 156–60.
51. W. Bosman, 1967, pp. 72–3.

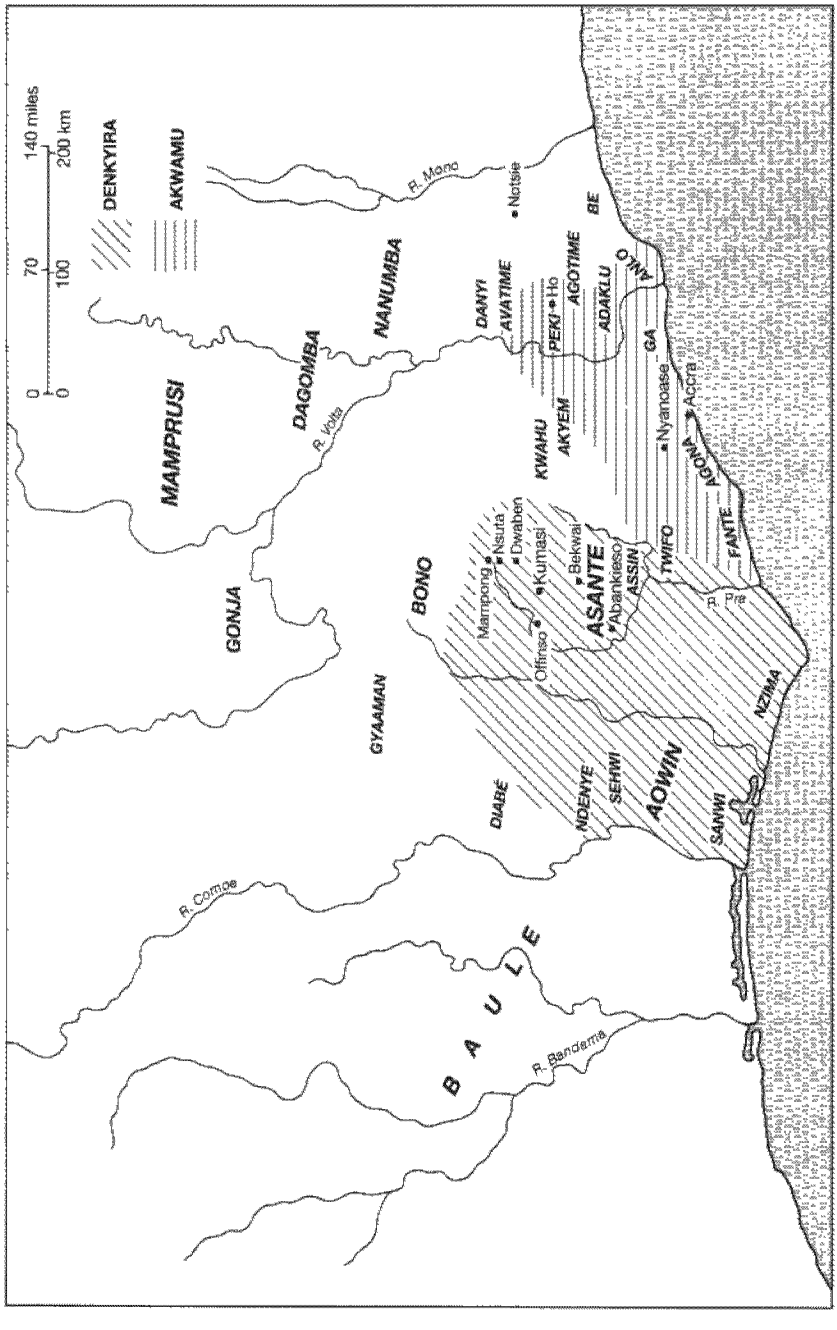

FIG 14.4 *States of the Lower Guinea coast, 1700 (after A. A. Boahen)*

the north, even crossing the River Volta and subduing the Ewe states of Peki, Ho and Kpandu.[52]

The Denkyira and Akwamu evolved similar machinery to administer their empires. Each was divided into two areas, metropolitan and provincial. The metropolitan centred around the capital headed by the *Omanhene* (king) who was also king of the whole empire. Under him was a series of officials or kings who performed certain functions at court, such as the *Batahene* (Minister of Trade), the *Sanaahene* (Finance), the *Gyaasehene* (Home Affairs), the *Akyeamehene* (Foreign Affairs and Head Linguist) and the *Sumankwaahene* (Religious Affairs). For politico-military purposes, each state was divided into wings, three in Denkyira and five in Akwamu. The Denkyira divisions were *Akumatire* (Right wing), *Kyeremfem* (Left wing) and *Agona Adontendom* (Advance Guard).[53] The Akwamu wings were *Benkum* (Left wing), *Nifa* (Right wing), *Adonten* or *Krontire* (Advance guard), *Kyidom* (Rear guard) and *Gyaase*. Each wing was headed by a king of a town or state within the metropolitan area or in the capital town itself. He exercised political control over his wing during peace time and became its *Osafohene* (war-leader) during wars. All the wing chiefs were members of the council that advised the *Omanhene*. The provincial area consisted of all the conquered states now part of the empire. Each continued to be ruled by its own king but was placed directly under the control of the *Omanhene* or a wing chief. Each state was expected to pay annual tribute and to fight in the wing of its head during battles.

Since Denkyira was the first state to develop into an empire, and since it had three wings while Akwamu had five, three of which were the same as those of Denkyira, Akwamu obviously borrowed the new imperial politico-military system from Denkyira, merely improving upon it by adding two more wings, namely *Kyidom* and *Gyaase*.

Many historians have seen the political history of the Gold Coast in the 1700s almost exclusively in terms of the rise of the Asante empire. But it was much more complex. First, there was the rise of other new states besides Asante. Secondly, there was the revival albeit brief, of Aowin and the overthrow of Denkyira and Akwamu by Akyem and Asante respectively. Thirdly, there was the expansion of the Fante kingdom to its widest territorial extent. Then, finally, there was the rise of the Asante empire, admittedly the most brilliant event of the century.

The other new eighteenth-century states included Nzima, the Aowin or Anyi states of Sanwi, Ndenye, Diabe, Moronou and Bettie, and many Baule principalities. After being defeated by the Denkyira in the 1680s, Amo Aseman led the Aowin or Anyi from Anwianwia across the River Tano to conquer the Agwa (Sohie and Anabula) and recreate their kingdom around Enchi. They were still consolidating when, in 1715, the Asante attacked forcing some Aowin westwards to found the kingdom of Sanwi

52. I. G. Wilks, 1957; K. Y. Daaku, 1970b, pp. 153–6.

53. J. K. Kumah, 1966, pp. 33–5; K. Y. Daaku, 1970b, p. viii.

after conquering the Aqua, Aboisse, Abakulo and Ekuebo and then the Eotile.[54] After establishing their capital, at Krinjabo, they soon conquered Assin thereby gaining control over trade between the interior and the Aby Lagoon.

North of Sanwi emerged the other Anyi states, Ndenye and Diabe, founded at the same time as Sanwi by the branch of Anwianwia refugees that moved north-westwards[55] into the area formerly occupied by the Agwa, Abure and other Lagunaires. The Anyi of Ndenye owed allegiance to Aowin until about 1715 but a section that refused to accept this moved away to found the kingdom of Bettie. Some Anyi, the Monfwe, crossed the River Comoe to establish the kingdom of Moronou.[56] The relations that existed between these latter states are not known but Ndenye was definitely brought under the control of Asante. Both Perrot and Gross thought that Ndenye served the *Asantehene* through the Sehwi state of Wiawso but recent research has confirmed Daaku's view that they did so through the *Bantamahene* of Kumasi.[57]

Northwest of the Anyi, between the Comoe and Bandama rivers, there also arose, during the first half of the eighteenth century, a host of Baule principalities or chiefdoms. The oral traditions of the founders clearly show that they arrived in two waves from the Gold Coast.[58] The first, the Alanguira Baule, arrived in 1700 about the same time as the Anyi. They came from Denkyira after its defeat by Asante in 1700–1. They settled in the area of the modern Canton of Agba whence some moved west to live among the Guro and Koro.

The second much larger wave, the Assabu, came from Kumasi following the disputed succession that broke out after the death of Osei Tutu in 1717. According to their oral traditions, they were led by their Queen Abla Poku who sacrificed her son to the spirit of the River Comoe before they could cross, hence their name *Baule* (the infant is dead). Some moved north to form the Ando and others south to Grand-Morie among the Attie and the Abe. The rest, still under Queen Abla Poku, moved south across the Bandama river and then north again to the Bouaké region. This group was divided into eight large families or clans: the Faafuwe, Nzipri, Aitu, Nanafowe, Warebo, Saafowe, Agba and Ngan.[59] Akwa Boni, who succeeded Queen Abla Poku, was apparently able to establish his authority over the Baule, the Malinke and the Mande who occupied the Warebo region. After his death, however, the kingdom broke up into independent chiefdoms.

54. Personal communication from H. Diabaté, 1977. See also R. A. Horowitz, 1974, pp. 330–79; H. Diabaté, 1977; M. A. Clerici, 1962, pp. 27–31.

55. C. H. Perrot, 1970 and 1974.

56. M. A. Clerici, 1962, pp. 27–31.

57. C. H. Perrot, 1970 and 1974, K. Y. Daaku, 1971.

58. J. P. Chaureau, 1979, pp. 24–5; M. A. Clerici, 1962, pp. 28–9; T. C. Weiskel, 1980, pp. 5–8.

59. M. A. Clerici, 1962, pp. 28–9; J. P. Chaureau, 1974.

Both waves of invaders soon mixed with the Guro, the Malinke, the Senufo and the Goli to form the modern Baule people.

The Nzima kingdom which also emerged at this time was the creation of three brothers, Annor Blay Ackah, Bua Kpanyili and Amihere II who amalgamated under their rule the three states of Jomoro, Abripiquem and Ankobra through their wealth gained from European trade. The most famous brother, Amihere II, was to become extremely rich in the 1760s. He extended the frontiers of the new kingdom, increasing its population by deliberately encouraging outsiders to settle there. Known in European records as Apollonia, this new state dominated the south-western corner of the Gold Coast throughout the eighteenth century.

Meanwhile some of the older states, such as Bron, Sehwi Wiawso, Aowin and Fante were extending their power and influence. Aowin, for example, appeared to have regained its independence from Denkyira in the 1690s. Greatly strengthened by refugees, who poured in from the Asante–Denkyira wars, it came to dominate the Sehwi states and from 1700–10 began the conquest of the gold- and ivory-producing regions to the north. So powerful and intrepid did it grow that, in 1718–19, under its commander Ebri Moro, it invaded the Asante, sacking the capital, Kumasi, and returning home with loot and captives including some members of the Asante royal family.[60]

Also in the early 1700s, the state of Bron conquered the Kulango to the south and part of the Nafana to the north and extended its power as far west as the Comoe river thereby dominating the trade routes from Bonduku to Kumasi and Krinjabo. The new Bron state was unique, being made up of Akan, Kulango, Nafana and Mande elements. At the top politically were the Akan invaders who maintained their clans, their matrilineal system of inheritance, their judicial system and aspects of their traditional religion. But they adopted Kulango and Nafana folklore, songs and dances and left untouched Nafana social structures and political orders at village and rural levels. In addition some of these three groups accepted Islam, introduced by the Mande–Joola who also greatly influenced the economic system of the kingdom.[61]

It was also between 1700 and 1710 that the Akwamu extended their empire across the River Volta to its widest territorial limits.[62] By 1730, in response partly to Akwamu expansion and later to Asante and Akyem expansion the Fante had conquered their neighbouring coastal states, Aguafo and Fetu to the west and the Agona to the east,[63] giving them control of the coast from the Pra river to the Ga kingdom.

The political changes that occurred in the central forest regions between the Comoe and Volta rivers between 1500 and 1800 were even more

60. K. Y. Daaku, n.d.; J. K. Fynn, 1971, p. 43.
61. M. Toure, 1974, pp. 463–78.
62. I. G. Wilks, 1957.
63. A. A. Boahen, 1965, pp. 180–2.

dramatic. First was the defeat and overthrow of the Denkyira empire in a series of wars (1699–1701) by the young Asante confederation of states. This was followed by the conquest of all Denkyira's former vassal states, such as the Sehwi states (1701–2), Twifo (1712–13) and Wassa (1713 and 1726). The Asante then conquered Aowin (1715–21), Nzima (1715) and the Anyi state of Ndenye (1715) to the south-west, and Wenchi (1711–14), Bono (1723–4), the Bron state (1731–40) and Gonja (1732) to the north-west.[64] Thus, by 1730, from the Comoe to the Volta rivers was under Asante control.

Second was the defeat in 1731 of Akwamu by Akyem Abuakwa and her allies the Ga, Kotoku and Agona.[65] The Akwamu rulers were driven from their traditional homelands across the Volta river where they founded their present capital town, Akwamufie, and the Birim–Densu basin was annexed by Akyem Abuakwa. Thus by 1733, from the Comoe to the Volta rivers was partitioned among the Asante, the Akyem and the Fante.

Centralization was completed between 1731 and 1750 when the Asante conquered Akyem Kotoku and Akyem Abuakwa (1742) and the Ga state (1744–5) to the south, Eastern Gonja and the Dagomba state (1744) to the north of the Volta river, and the Krakye and Bassa states (1744–5) to the north-east.[66] By the mid-1700s the Asante empire stretched from the middle reaches of the Comoe river in the west to the River Volta in the east and from beyond the Volta in the north, south to the sea except for the Fante state directly south of Kumasi. The Fante maintained their sovereign existence throughout the eighteenth century through their own diplomatic skills and strong support from the British who wanted to stop the Asante gaining control over the whole coast.[67]

Asante's structure and government was similar to Akwamu's and Denkyira's. It was divided into metropolitan Asante and provincial Asante (Greater Asante, as Arhin calls it). Metropolitan Asante – unlike Metropolitan Denkyira or Akwamu – consisted not of just one town or state but, significantly, of all the former states within a fifty-kilometre radius of Kumasi. These included Dwaben, Kokofu, Bekwai, Nsuta, Mampong, Offinso, Asumenya, Denyasi, Adansi and Kumawu all of which recognized the *Ohene* (king) of the Kumasi state as their *Asantehene* (paramount king) and Kumasi as their capital. They accepted the Golden Stool as the soul and sacred symbol of the unity and survival of the Asante nation and were represented by their own *Omanhene* on the Asanteman Council, the governing body of the confederation and the entire empire. For politico-military reasons, metropolitan Asante was divided, like Akwamu, into five wings with the same names as their Akwamu counterparts: *Benkum*, *Nifa*,

64. For details of these campaigns and conquests, see J. K. Fynn, 1971, pp. 40–83; K. Y. Daaku, 1970, pp. 173–81; I. G. Wilks, 1975, pp. 18–29.

65. F. Addo-Fening, 1980.

66. I. G. Wilks, 1975, pp. 18–29; J. K. Fynn, 1971, pp. 57–80.

67. For further details, see A. A. Boahen, 1965, pp. 182–5; and 1974.

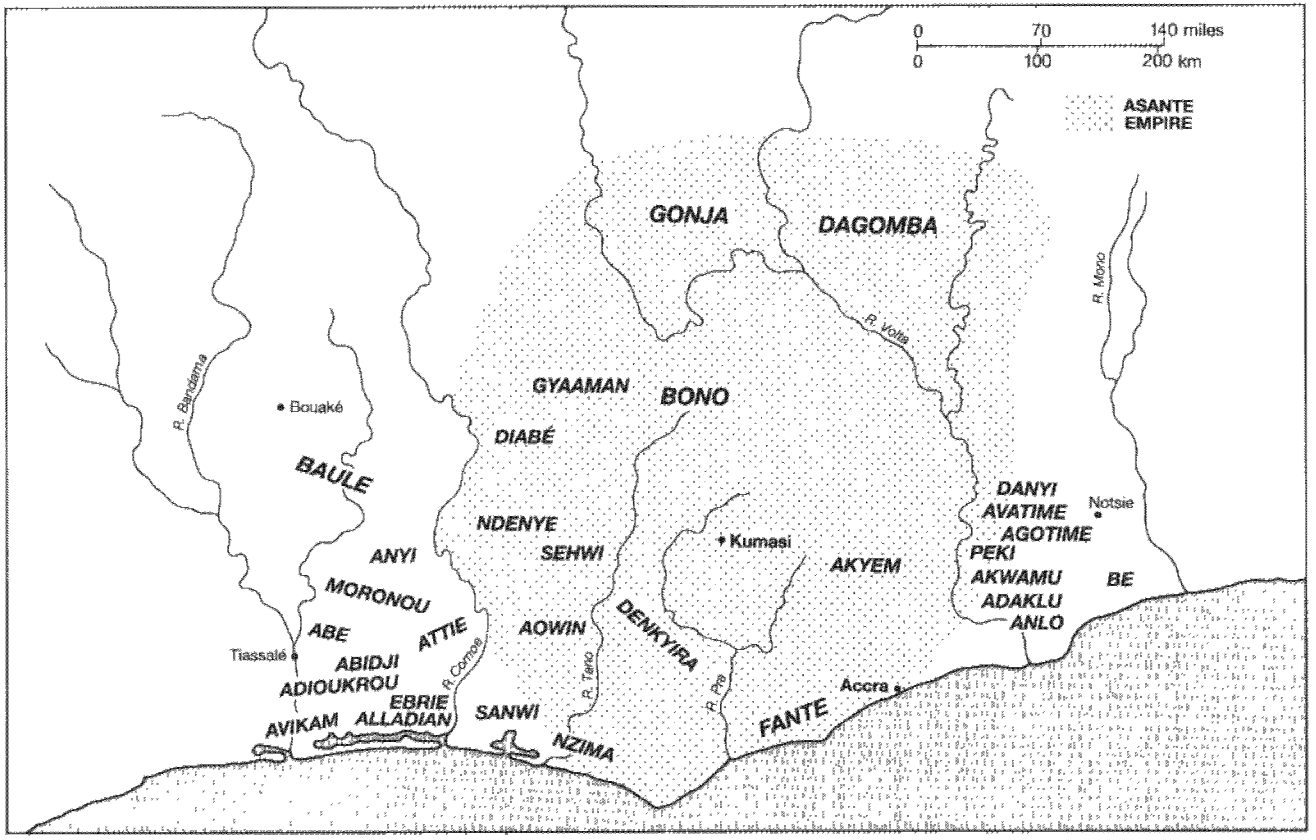

FIG 14.5 *States of the Lower Guinea coast, 1750 (after A. A. Boahen)*

Adonten, *Kyidom* and *Gyaase*. Each component state, including Kumasi, was organized likewise.

Provincial or Greater Asante consisted of all the states conquered and reduced by the Asante to vassal or tributary status. These states had no direct representatives on the Asanteman Council nor any direct access to the *Asantehene*. Instead each state served the *Asantehene* through, or was, an *adamfo* (client state) of one of the kings or member-states of the confederacy or one of the wing-chiefs of the Kumasi state, usually resident in Kumasi. Thus, Krakye and Bassa served Kumasi through the *Dwabenhene*, Gonja through the *Mamponghene*, Atebubu through the *Adontehene* of Kumasi and Denkyira through the *Akwamuhene* of Kumasi.[68] Otherwise the states were largely left alone as long as they paid their annual tribute and participated in any wars. It was to strengthen this otherwise lax *adamfo* system of provincial administration that, from 1760–1800, Asante representatives were stationed as district and regional commissioners in some provincial states.[69]

Between 1670 and 1750 political revolution had taken place in the forest and coastal regions of Lower Guinea. From the thirty-eight states of the 1629 map had emerged the three large empires of Aowin, Denkyira and Akwamu which by 1750, had merged into the single empire of Asante.

The first reason for the rise of these empires and the centralization of states was that the four states in question had the motivation to expand and the money with which to buy arms and ammunition. Aowin, Denkyira, Akwamu and Asante were the leading gold-producing states and the latter two the leading kola-producers for the northern trade. Furthermore, situated between the coastal and savannah regions, all played the role of middle-men in the trade between those two regions.

By expanding northwards and southwards these states would gain control of the major trade routes and also the other gold- and kola-producing regions. An even stronger motivation for expansion was the European presence on the coast. By the mid-1600s European trade had become far more lucrative than trade with the savannah. If the inland states expanded to the coast they could trade directly with the Europeans and maximize profits. The challenge proved irresistible with all sooner or later fighting their way to the coast. Aowin expanded to include Apollonia, Denkyira expanded south to Ahanta and Fetu, Akwamu conquered Agona and the Ga kingdoms on the coast, and Asante finally conquered all of them and established direct contact with the Europeans.

The states that made up metropolitan Asante were motivated economically and politically. They were eager, given good alternative leadership, to rid themselves of their tyrannical Denkyira conquerors. That Denkyira rule was oppressive is borne out by the oral traditions of the pre-Asante states and also by contemporary European sources. As the Dutch Director-

68. I. G. Wilks, 1975, pp. 39 and 151.
69. A. A. Boahen, 1965, pp. 342–4.

General at El Mina, J. Van Sevenhuysen, remarked in 1701: 'The Denkyiras, for a long time past have been very bellicose and proud over their victories and have been intolerable to their neighbours.' Bosman, a contemporary observer, also notes that: 'Denkyira elevated by its great Richness and Power, became so arrogant, that it looked on all other Negroes with a contemptible Eye, esteeming them no more than its slaves; which rendered it the object of their common hatred, each impatiently wishing its downfall.'[70] What they needed was leadership and this was provided by Osei Tutu and Opoku Ware, the founders of the Asante empire.

The other reason behind the rise of the three great empires was that the four expansionist states were free from interference in their internal affairs. The Akyem and the coastal states, although not without money or motivation, failed to develop into empires because they were denied such freedom. Sandwiched between expanding Denkyira and, later, Asante to the west and Akwamu to the east, the Akyem states were on the defensive throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Similarly, the coastal states' internal affairs were subjected to all sorts of interference by rival European nations on the coast, at times resulting in armed conflict, such as the Komenda–Dutch wars of the 1690s. Indeed, throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, cardinal European policy was to prevent any coastal state from gaining ascendancy. The inland states of Aowin, Denkyira, Akwamu and Asante, however, were initially free from direct European interference and could sufficiently consolidate their power before encountering them.

Two other factors should also be taken into account in explaining the rise of the three empires: the adoption of a new technology and the high quality of leadership. Guns and gunpowder had become the most prized European import from 1650 onwards and, with their gold and other resources, the rulers of these states, could purchase what ammunition they needed. With guns their expansionist activities were obviously greatly accelerated. In traditional warfare two enemies faced each other in dense columns using spears, swords, axes, knives, bows and arrows and even hand combat in battle. The use of guns introduced fighting in different wings. This led to the evolution of the three wings by Denkyira followed by the five wings of Akwamu and Asante. This new military formation was superimposed on the traditional political structure of king plus advisory council of clan and lineage heads. Without able rulers these states could not have adapted their traditional warfare and old political structure to the new technology.

At this stage little is known about the Aowin kings but both oral and European documentary sources acclaim the courage, tact and prowess of the rulers of Denkyira, Akwamu and Asante. The Denkyira kings included Werempe Ampem, Boadu Akafu Brempon and the most illustrious, Boa Amponsem; Akwamu's included Ansa Saskraku, Basua and Akwono and

70. W. Bosman, 1979, pp. 74–5.

Asante's Osei Tutu and Opoku Ware.[71] These kings converted their small kingdoms into huge empires in a series of brilliant, carefully-timed and well co-ordinated campaigns.

Many historians believe that these empires were products of the slave trade. Fage, for instance, has contended that

> on the whole it is probably true to say that the operation of the slave trade may have tended to integrate, strengthen and develop military, territorial authority but to weaken more segmentary societies. Whether this was good or evil may be a nice point; historically, it may be seen as purposive and perhaps as more or less inevitable.[72]

Clerici and others also maintain that 'On peut même dire que ces royaumes (i.e. Dahomey et Achanti), qui n'existaient pas auparavant, sont nés de la traite.'[73] This may be true of other parts of West Africa but not for this area. On the Gold Coast the slave trade only became significant economically from 1700–10 while expansionist activities had begun in the 1670s and 1680s. In the Gold Coast the slave trade was the consequence not the cause of the state-building process.

In the Akan areas west of the River Tano and the Ewe areas east of the Volta river, home of the Lagunaires, the Anyi and the Baule, no such dramatic political change took place at this time. Political conditions in 1800 were much as they had been fifty or a hundred years earlier with small kingdoms or chiefdoms, each made up of loosely united family groups from clans of common ancestry.

In 1800 Ewe territory was still split into many independent *dukowo* (territorial divisions or what Amenumey calls chiefdoms and paramountcies) of varying sizes ranging from the single town of Wodze to Anlo of thirty-six independent towns and villages scattered far and wide.[74] By 1900 the number of Eweland *dukowo* had grown to 120, each ruled by a *fia* (king) elected patrilineally from one or two lineages of the founding families. He was assisted by a Council of Elders, consulted on every issue. Under him were the chiefs of the villages of the *dukowo* and, in turn, each village was made up of lineages under the lineage head. At village or town level, all able-bodied male adults participated in open discussions on all matters before a decision could be taken by the chief and his elders. There are several reasons why the Western Akan of the Tano–Bandama basin and the Ewe of the Volta–Mono basin did not consolidate themselves. First, the migrations into their lands continued throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the breakaway movements into smaller and smaller settlements even into the nineteenth. By 1800 therefore, the Ewe

71. For details of the roles played by these rulers, see J. K. Fynn, 1975; A. A. Boahen, 1965; K. Y. Daaku, 1970b; J. K. Kumah, 1966; I. G. Wilks, 1957.

72. J. D. Fage, 1969a.

73. M. A. Clerici, 1962, p. 67.

74. D. E. K. Amenumey, 1969; C. K. Nukunya, 1969.

and Western Akan were not sufficiently settled to embark on wars of expansion. Secondly, as these migrants were themselves escaping the centralization and tyrannical behaviour of their former rulers, they were not likely to recreate the same socio-political structures in their new homes. Thirdly, in the case of the Ewe, economic motivation for state-building was lacking. As Amenumey puts it:

> Eweland lacked the economic incentive, a necessary prerequisite to the evolution of centralized political entities. It is the production of economic surpluses that provides the first incentive for centralization.[75]

Without gold, ivory or kola nuts, the Ewe could not participate in the long-established and lucrative north-south Atlantic trade. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, their main export was slaves, an activity which jeopardized peace, stability and orderly government – the requirements for political expansion or centralization.

The Western Akan did have gold, ivory and kola but because the trade routes to the north were controlled by the Mande, the Senufo, the Kulango and the Eastern Akan, especially the Asante, they profited little from that trade. Nor did they take part in the lucrative trade with Hausaland and Borno to the north-east. They therefore had no money for large-scale expansionist activities.

The third reason for the Ewe and Western Akan's failure to consolidate was ecological.[76] Because they were cut off from inland areas by numerous lagoons no Europeans would settle there, thus depriving them of any real economic incentive to expand southwards to the coast.

The fourth and probably most important reason was their neighbours' constant interference in their political affairs which kept the Ewe and Western Akan on the defensive. The Western Akan faced the threat of the Sehwi and especially the Asante throughout the eighteenth century. Likewise, from the 1680s, the Ewe faced active interference first by the kings of Grand and Little Popo, then by the Akwamu and, in the eighteenth century, by Dahomey to the east and all-conquering Asante to the west.

Social and cultural changes in Lower Guinea

The most obvious socio-cultural change in Lower Guinea between 1500 and 1800 was demographic. With so many new food crops from the Americas and Asia, especially maize and some species of yams, the populations of the Lower Guinea coast greatly increased during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries – as is borne out by contemporary European documents. During the eighteenth century, however, largely as a result of the slave trade, the population remained stagnant or even decreased. As

75. D. E. K. Amenumey, 1969.
76. Personal communication by C. Wondji.

Inikori has shown,[77] the population of Lower Guinea would be much higher today had it not been for the Atlantic slave trade.

Secondly, society had become more sophisticated. In 1500 it had been composed of a ruling aristocracy consisting of a religious élite of priests (who wielded most power) and a political élite of kings and queens, ordinary subjects and domestic slaves. By 1800, however, the political élite had superseded the religious, except among the Ga–Adangbe and the Ewe. Furthermore, the tremendous increase in economic activities, especially in gold-mining and long-distance trade, and the numerous wars of expansion and domination, had led to an increase in domestic slaves. Slaves in Lower Guinea at this time were allowed to own property and marry free citizens. Some held responsible jobs and could even inherit the property of their owners by whom they were regarded as part of the family. By 1800 most had become integrated into society and it had become a sacred law, especially among the Akan, not to divulge the origins of such people.

Moreover, as a result of trading activities and the European presence, three new classes emerged unknown to traditional society. They were most prominent in the coastal areas between the Tano and the Volta rivers, and included a wage-earning class, an independent class of wealthy traders and middlemen merchant princes, and a *mulatto* group.[78] The first class consisted of people employed by Europeans as masons, carpenters, bricklayers, interpreters, writers or secretaries, goldbrokers, civil-servants, ambassadors and public-relations officers. European records abound in references to such people. Some were literate and acted as intermediaries between Europeans and traditional rulers and their subjects.

The second class consisted of Africans, individuals or groups, who, through their own efforts in farming or trade, became exceedingly wealthy and more powerful even than the traditional rulers. This class included, on the Gold Coast, people such as John Ahenakwa and John Claessen of Fetu, Asomani of Akwamu, John Kabes of Komenda, John Konny of Ahanta and John Currantee of Anomabo (also known in oral tradition as Eno Baisie Kurentsi). On eastern Ivory Coast there also emerged the Kosehirange and the Essouma who acted as brokers or middlemen between the Europeans and the Avikam, Eotile, Abure, Sanwi, Aowin and Sehwi of the interior. By 1800 the Kosehirange in particular had become extremely wealthy and powerful and were playing a key role in the choice of lineage heads.[79] Trade between the coast and inland was brisk. Ordinary people as well as traditional rulers could participate in it and the forest peoples played the lucrative role of middlemen-cum-producers. If a wage-earning group did not emerge, at least a group of wealthy traditional rulers and independent merchant princes must have arisen. Unfortunately, European sources and oral traditions are both silent on this subject.

77. J. E. Inikori, 1979, pp. 68–71.
78. K. Y. Daaku, 1970b, pp. 96–143.
79. Based on a contribution by C. Wondji.

The *mulatto* group was the product of miscegenation between European traders and African women. Such people could be found all along the Lower Guinea coast. Although contemporaries such as Bosman have spoken of them disparagingly as a 'bastard strain ... made up of a parcel of profligate villains neither true to the Negroes nor us',[80] some, such as Geenlendonck, Bosman, Barter, Gordon and, above all, the descendants of Richard Brew, played important roles in commercial and political life.[81]

Another important social change was the introduction of Christianity and western education by the Europeans, and of Islam by the Mande and Hausa traders. Both Dutch and English established elementary schools in their castles at Cape Coast, El Mina and Accra and, in the 1750s, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel sent missionaries to Cape Coast. Moreover, some *mulattos*' and some traditional rulers' children were sent abroad to be educated with several, including Christian Pedersen, Svane, Capitein and Philip Quacoe, returning home as teachers and missionaries. Thus, by 1800 a small educated élite and a few Christian converts could be found in such coastal towns as Accra and Cape Coast.

Even earlier than Christianity was the spread of Islam and Muslim culture along the northern trade routes, into northern Ghana by the fourteenth century and Asante and Baule by the 1750s. By 1800 Kumasi had a thriving Muslim quarter with a Ḳur'ānic school and, according to Wilks, the last eighteenth-century *Asantehene*, Osei Kwame (1777–1801), was deposed because of his attachment to the Muslim religion.[82]

By 1800, however, both Christianity and Islam had made little impact on most peoples of the Lower Guinea coast, although the art of reading and writing in both Arabic and European languages had been firmly established.

As substantiated by fast-growing archaeological evidence,[83] the Guinea-coast societies had, by 1800, developed the arts and crafts of potting, sculpture (in wood, ivory and clay), weaving, smithing and casting (in brass, copper and gold) with some groups specializing in a particular craft. Equally developed were their music, drumming and dancing.

Potting, one of the world's oldest crafts, dating in Ghana, for example, from the Later Stone Age (after -3000),[84] was highly developed by 1700 particularly among the Adangbe whose pots were exported as far as Bonduku in Côte d'Ivoire. According to Anquandah, pottery was raised to a fine art by the Asante who produced 'some of the best-quality polymorphic pottery with complex motifs such as the *abusua kuruwa*, clan pot and the

80. W. Bosman, 1967, pp. 141–2.
81. M. Priestley, 1969.
82. I. G. Wilks, 1961 and 1966a.
83. J. Anquandah, 1982.
84. ibid., p. 53

mogyemogye ceremonial jaw-bone pot, a wine jar used for pouring libation on the Golden Stool'.[85]

Carving and sculpting in wood, ivory and clay was also developed during this period – particularly among the Akan. Wooden stools, drums, umbrella tops and linguist staffs were made. Wood-carving reached its zenith during the sixteenth century when the Denkyira kings, to quote Anquandah, 'developed the political and cultural ideology connected with the Adanse stool'.[86] Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century European visitors to the Ghana coast, such as Bosman, were impressed by the beauty of the ivory-side-blown trumpets that they found. Particularly well-known are the *akuaba* (fertility dolls) in wood and clay and the sculptured clay portraits of deceased kings and queens.

Weaving also developed during this period. According to a recent study, weaving on narrow horizontal looms was introduced to the Akan, Ewe and the Ga from western Sudan probably via the Nile valley rather than the western Maghreb.[87] We do not know exactly when this knowledge reached the forest and coastal regions but it must have been before the arrival of the Portuguese, becoming widespread in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Both Brun and Barbot reported that cloth of six stripes from Côte d'Ivoire was being exported to the Gold Coast. According to the 1629 map, Nsoko (now identified as Begho) was an important centre 'where cloths are woven like carpets which are worn among the Acanists'.[88] Those weavers also produced blankets, known among the Akan as *kassa*, *bomo* and *nsaa*, which are still highly valued by them. But it was in the eighteenth century, as Lamb has clearly shown, that weaving among the Akan and the Ewe attained its maturity and highest sophistication. This is amply demonstrated by the now famous colourful *kente* cloths of the Akan and the rich *adanudo* cloths of the Ewe who originated them (Plate 14.2).[89] The making of *adinkra* cloth, a broad cloth with Akan traditional motifs and symbols stamped on it, also became famous in the Brong region and was later copied by the Asante.

However, it was in smithing and casting, especially in gold and brass, that the greatest development occurred among the Akan in particular. Using mainly the *cire-perdue* (lost-wax) process, these smiths produced exquisite gold and silver regalia including sword ornaments, rings, bangles, chains and headgear. Goldsmithing was well established before the advent of the Europeans but drawing on the expertise of their Muslim craftsmen, the Brong, then the Denkyira and particularly the Asante developed the art during the 1600s and 1700s, to a degree of excellence not since superseded. The Akan smiths also produced thousands of geometric and figur-

85. J. Anquandah, 1982, p. 40.
86. ibid.
87. J. Lamb, 1975, p. 219.
88. S. Brun, 1624 and J. Barbot, 1732.
89. ibid., pp. 91–9.

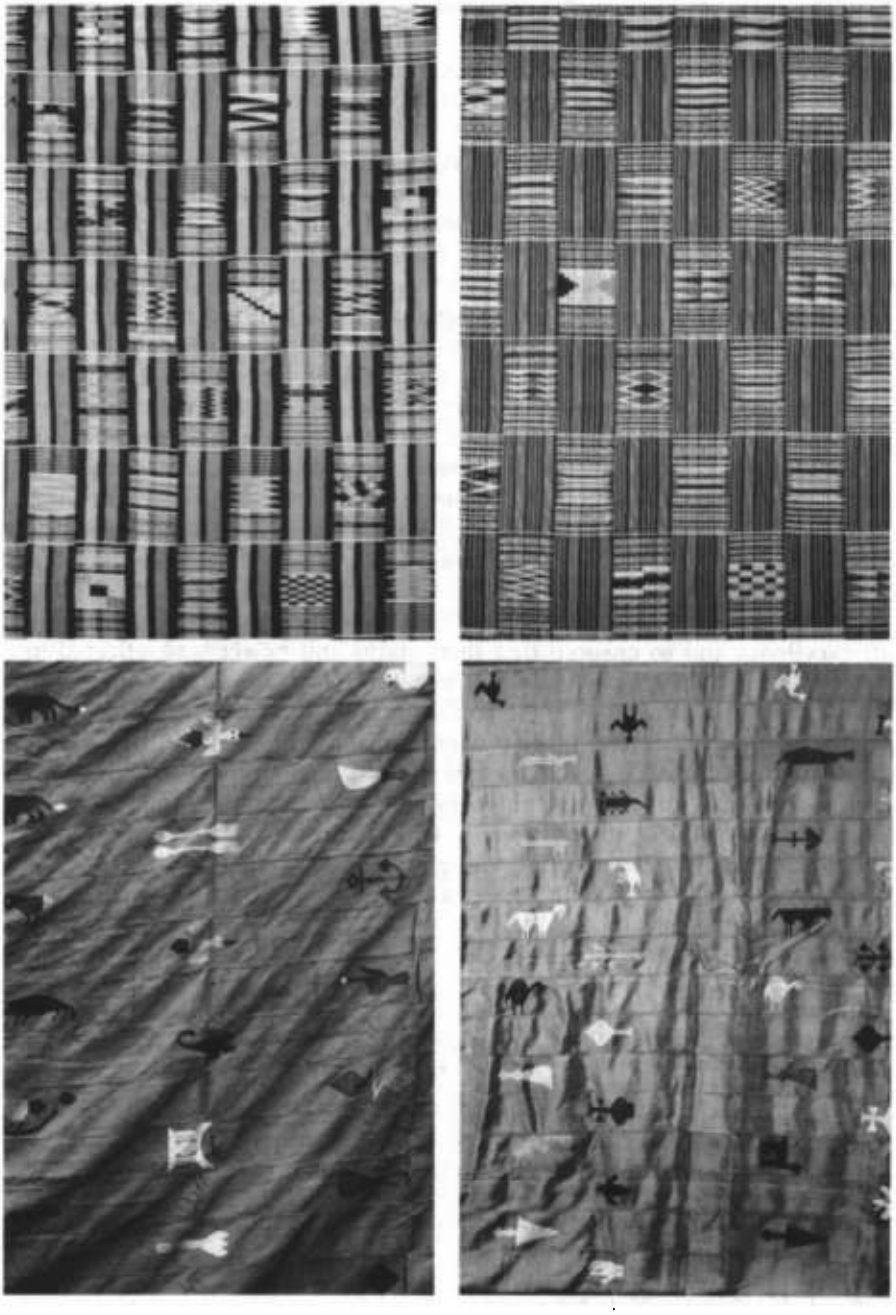

PLATE 14.2 *West African weaving; (above) Kente cloths, Asante silks (below) Adanudo cloths, Ewe silks*

ative gold or brass weights, now a great attraction for European tourists and found in famous art museums worldwide (Plate 14.3).[90] Casting, especially in brass, was also developed at this time and exquisite brass caskets for keeping gold dust in and brass vessels for storing shea butter were also made.

With the rise of the Asante empire in the eighteenth century the arts and crafts of the Lower Guinea coast reached their peak. The Asante kings expanded not only territorially and politically but did everything in their power to promote arts and crafts. Following the defeat of Denkyira, Tekyiman and Akyem, they collected their best craftsmen and goldsmiths and sent them to Kumasi,[91] as Anquandah has pointed out: 'with the establishment of the Asante confederation, the Asante kings centralised all Asante arts and crafts in the neighbourhood of the capital, Kumasi'.[92] Ahwiaa was established as the centre for stool-making, Bonwire for kente-weaving, Tafo for pottery, Fumesua for iron work and Krofofrom for brass-casting. Moreover, the *Asantehene* established the Apagyafie – a group of goldsmiths and other craftsmen from Denkyira whose duty was to make his regalia. He also introduced the golden *Asomfo* stool whose first occupant, Nana Tabiri, was the son of a Denkyira chief.[93]

By blending expertise and artistic traditions, the Asante kings of the eighteenth century brought Akan cultural development to its highest peak of excellence and so ensured that their status and power was reflected in art forms of the highest quality. They developed a golden culture and civilization symbolized by their sophisticated golden regalia, their rich, multi-coloured kente cloth, their elaborate court protocol and their complicated and artistic gold weights that amazed Europeans visiting Kumasi in the 1700s and early 1800s.[94] Despite the impact of colonialism, and the iconoclasm of and condemnation by Christian missionaries in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the goldsmiths' art never died out and fascinating regalia in gold and silver are still being produced, particularly by the Asante.

Conclusion

1500 to 1800 was indeed a period of radical change for the states and peoples of the Lower Guinea coast. Politically the process towards centralization was completed. Economically, trade in gold and ivory was eclipsed by the slave trade; the commercial and economic centres moved from inland to the coast; strong commercial links were forged with the

90. For a fascinating study of Akan gold weights, see T. F. Garrard, 1980, pp. 171–363.
91. ibid., p. 198.
92. J. Anquandah, 1982, p. 40.
93. T. F. Garrard, 1980, p. 299.
94. T. F. Garrard, 1980, pp. 47–8; M. D. McLeod, 1981, pp. 72–6; J. Anquandah, 1982, pp. 39–44 and 100–12.

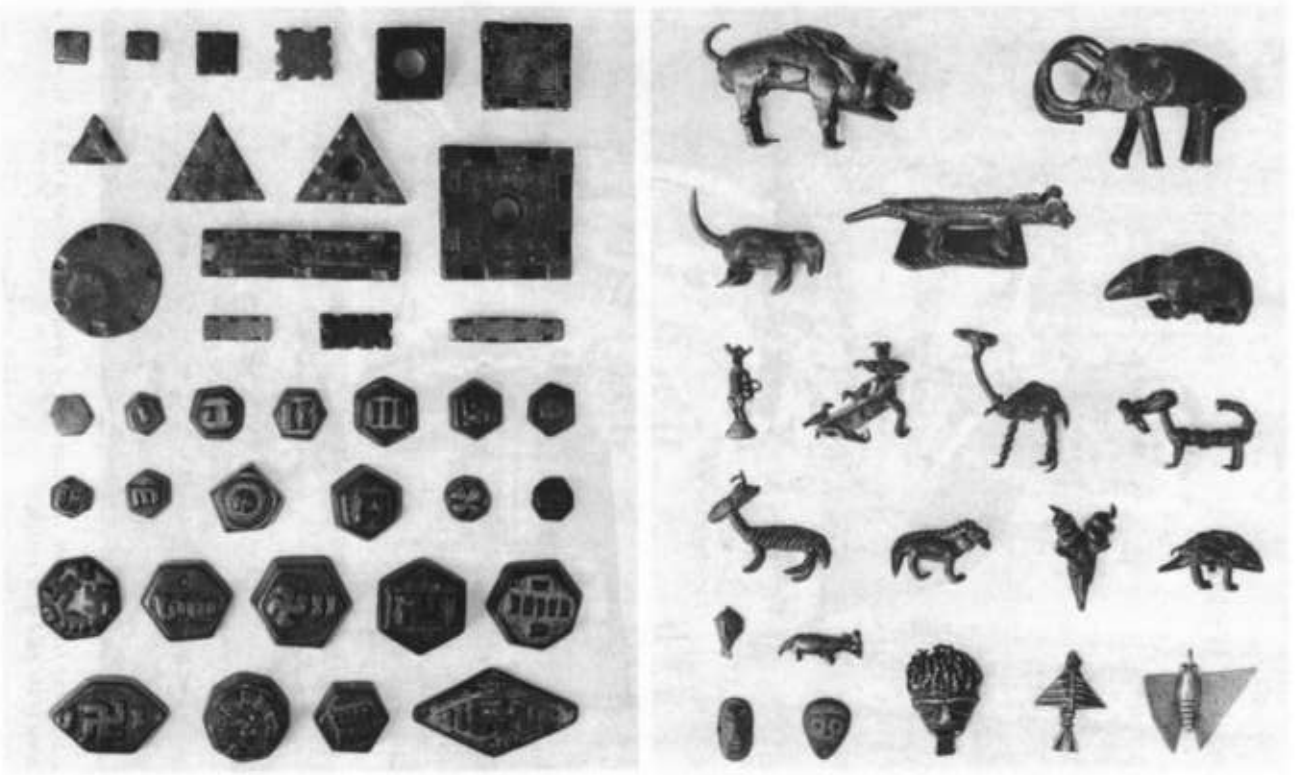

PLATE 14.3 *Akan brass weights for weighing gold-dust. Geometric forms (left) were used from the fifteenth century onwards: figurative forms (right), in use from the seventeenth century, also served to illustrate popular proverbs and maxims*

PLATE 14.4 *Nana Otuo Siriboe II,* Omanhene *of Dwaben state, in a rich Kente cloth and wearing some of the gold state regalia*

Americas and Europe, thereby integrating the local economy with the global. Above all, this was a period of social change: the evolution of new classes, although on a limited scale and confined mainly to the coast; the introduction of literacy, western education and Christianity; the spread of Islam; and the flowering of indigenous cultures, especially in weaving and metal-work. These were indeed dynamic centuries for the peoples of the Lower Guinea coast, all the more so because at the end they were in full control of their own destiny and sovereignty.